



Examining the Impact of Child Externalizing Behaviors on Parental Stress in Families of Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)



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Background

- Parents of children with ASD experience more parental stress than parents of typically developing children (Baker-Ericzen et al., 2005).
- High levels of externalizing behaviors in children is correlated with parental stress (Gong et al., 2015; Hastings et al., 2005).
- Parental stress in fathers of children with ASD is affected more by child externalizing behaviors, whereas mothers' parental stress is impacted more by their child's regulatory behaviors (Davis and Carter 2008).
- Fathers are underrepresented in ASD literature (Braunstein et al. 2013; Flippin and Crais 2011).

Methods

Participants: 58,838 respondents (44,254 mothers and 15,584 fathers) from the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) 2011-2012.

- 67.6% Caucasian, 12.2% Hispanic, 8.4% African American, 9.9% multiracial, and 1.8% unknown
- Age of child ranged from 6-17 years (M=11.73, SD=3.49)

Measures: Selected three relevant survey questions to create a parental stress measure and three survey questions to create a measure of child externalizing behaviors. Higher scores reflected higher parental stress and child externalizing behaviors.

Objective

The current study examined whether parental stress differs between mothers and fathers of children who have ASD and whether severity of child externalizing behaviors is related to parents' parental stress level.

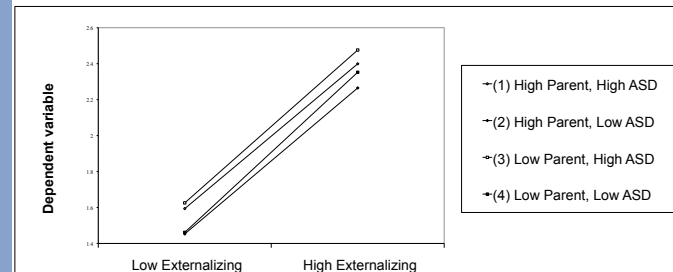
Results

Research Design:

- We tested differences in parental stress scores among parents of children with and without ASD using an independent samples t-test.
- We tested whether child externalizing behaviors was predictive of parental stress using regression analyses.
- We tested for an interaction between parent gender, presence of child ASD, and level of externalizing behaviors on parental stress.

Results:

- Differences in parental stress for children with and without ASD: $t(1291.04) = -33.16, p < .001$
- ASD children's externalizing behaviors significantly predicted parental stress: $\beta = .541, p < .001; R^2 = .293$
- Interaction found: parent gender, ASD status, and externalizing behavior: $\beta = .099, p < .05; R^2 = .371$



Conclusions

- Child ASD status and level of externalizing behaviors significantly impacted parental stress.
- Mothers of children with ASD who exhibited high levels of externalizing behaviors experienced the greatest stress, while fathers of children with ASD high on externalizing behaviors were less stressed.

Future Directions

- Examine changes in these variables over time through use of longitudinal data.
- Include observations of parenting interactions in addition to parent-report measures.
- Translate results into effective intervention inclusive of both parents targeting child behaviors.

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